

# SPECIAL REPORT

ASPI

## ASPI-KAS

4th Australia–Europe Counter-Terrorism Dialogue

‘Shifting frontiers: addressing post-caliphate terrorism dynamics’

22–24 October 2018, Canberra

Isaac Kfir and Katja Theodorakis

ASPI  
AUSTRALIAN  
STRATEGIC  
POLICY  
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Konrad  
Adenauer  
Stiftung

October 2019

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Through its international activities and projects in cooperation with local partners in over 120 countries across 6 continents, KAS seeks to make a substantial contribution to international cooperation and knowledge exchange through national and international conferences, political analysis, consultancy and training/exchange programs.

Current global developments - such as a shifting and increasingly volatile security environment as well as the fight against all forms of extremism, underscore the common interests of Australia and Europe as value-partners to uphold the global rules-based order.

KAS's Regional Programme for Australia and the Pacific was established with an office in Canberra in March 2017, seeking to foster durable collaboration through dialogue among policy and political decision-makers, representatives of leading think tanks and academic experts.

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First published October 2019

Published in Australia by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute

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Participants at the fourth Australia–Europe Counter-Terrorism Dialogue, October 2018.

# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*Ms Katja Theodorakis, Programme Manager Foreign/Security Policy and Counter-Terrorism at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Regional Programme Australia and the Pacific*

## Introduction

In October 2018, a delegation of counterterrorism (CT) practitioners, policymakers and academics travelled from Europe to Australia to participate in the 4th Australia–Europe Counterterrorism Dialogue, titled ‘Shifting Frontiers: Addressing Post-Caliphate Terrorism Dynamics’. This annual Track 1.5 dialogue was initiated in 2015 by Dr Beatrice Gorawantschy, the Director of the Regional Programme Australia and the Pacific at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) and Mr Peter Jennings, the Executive Director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI). They had recognised that Australia and Europe shared similar challenges in countering violent extremism (CVE)—and yet no forum existed for those involved in combating these issues to share their views, develop better understandings and explore how cooperation could be strengthened.

Proving to be a winning formula, this laid the groundwork for a number of successful seminars and thought-provoking exchanges. The 2017 dialogue, for instance, took an Australian delegation to Berlin and Brussels to explore how to proactively deal with an ever-evolving threat landscape. The 2018 ASPI–KAS Dialogue continued with this theme by focusing on how the fall of the Islamic State’s ‘caliphate’ in the Middle East would affect terrorism dynamics. In particular, it sought to identify the extent to which Australia and European states had adjusted their systems and outlooks to respond to the challenges posed by ISIS in the ‘post-caliphate’ period. Discussions were held under the Chatham House rule to allow for an open, confidential exchange.

This report covers the key themes of the dialogue, which were deliberately chosen to reflect contemporary trends. The overarching purpose is to capture the main ideas discussed at the dialogue and link them to wider policy-relevant debates. The various contributions by participants from Australia and Germany illustrate this breadth of perspectives.

In particular, the dialogue sought not to take common conceptualisations at face value but to critically examine existing understandings; this also extends to seeing whether what has been tried in Europe can be applied to Australia, and vice versa.

In this spirit, it is useful to begin with a critical examination of even the term ‘post-caliphate dynamics’, since the crumbling of the physical caliphate in the Middle East doesn’t mean that the militant group does not have a ‘post-caliphate strategy’, also in its propaganda. Instead, one should ask what exactly those new dynamics are as Islamic State (IS) shifts from its territorial hold to a more global insurgency. Accordingly, the dialogue’s title—‘Shifting Frontiers: Addressing Post-Caliphate Terrorism Dynamics’—was designed to invite a deeper analysis of those dynamics.



This included an examination of how states are addressing the concern of radicalisation in the correctional system, exploring the fusion between existing crime networks and terrorist activity, the so-called ‘crime–terror nexus’. This meant assessing how observable the phenomenon is in the respective regions of Europe, Australia and the Asia–Pacific.

Against the backdrop of the increasing prominence of local or ‘glocal’ manifestations of jihadism, it is furthermore important to understand how Southeast Asia has the potential to become a new focal point of *jihadi* activity. As a particular feature of this dialogue, special consideration was given to this region due to its strategic interest to both Australia and Europe.

Additionally, there is growing pressure on the tech industry to participate in the campaign against the proliferation of extremist content online. This raises questions over data protection, privacy and individual freedoms (versus collective security) in liberal societies. The dialogue therefore also engaged with the increasingly important topic of responsible encryption laws, in a comparative perspective.

Trust and openness are two important ingredients in any cooperation venture. Through the continuity afforded by this dialogue series, an effective process has been established in which participants are able to engage in a frank exchange of ideas and explore options for how to best deal with contemporary jihadism trends.

We hope this volume contributes to enhancing shared knowledge on this important topic.

## Background

The spread of *jihadi* terrorism—through the rise of militant groups such as al-Qaeda and IS—has for the last 25 years been an outgrowth of conflict in the Middle East. Particularly since 9/11, the national security situation of liberal democracies has been directly linked to developments in the conflict zones of Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria—and how they are shaped by Western policy decisions. Yet, the stagnating peace process with the Taliban and the failure to successfully build up moderate Syrian opposition forces are testament to the difficulties inherent in these processes. This way, the involvement of liberal powers in these areas has been described as ‘armed politics’<sup>1</sup>—a phenomenon that has led to continuous engagement in seemingly permanent conflicts. Despite the initial enthusiasm that the destruction of IS’s physical caliphate in Syria and Iraq would also signal the demise of the terrorist movement, such predictions were premature. This is especially pertinent, seeing that the grievances and structural dynamics that enabled the movement’s rise in the Middle East still exist and in fact can easily be exploited again. IS has shown itself as a force capable of adaptation, having successfully undergone phases of transition before. This way, it is resorting back to inciting sectarian tensions, making use of governance voids and instilling terror in the population it seeks to control.

Even though IS is disavowed by the majority of Muslims, the group nevertheless managed to successfully leverage a number of existing socio-political variables to its advantage. Socio-economic injustices, combined with sectarian discrimination and fuelled by larger geopolitical rivalries, provided a fertile soil for IS to take hold. In a region that was already politically fragmented, IS exploited power vacuums and abuses by local governments and security forces that resulted from years of civil war in Iraq and Syria. IS’s appeal derived from what was perceived by enough of the local populations as a corrupt, criminal Iraqi state—especially the cruelty of its security forces. All these factors are, directly and indirectly, a product of the conditions created by the 2003 Iraq War and how the post-invasion transition was handled by the Coalition Provisional Authority and the ensuing Iraqi state.<sup>2</sup>

It is also important to remember that IS in Iraq and Syria has some of its roots in the prison cultures of Camp Bucca and Abu Ghraib—places that were filled with the kind of indiscriminate violence, abuse, injustices and ideology that breeds violent extremism. After military defeat, remaining IS fighters are now detained in camps or prisons in Iraq and especially Syria, with no adequate law-enforcement or judicial infrastructure to hold or try them, some of them returning to their local communities. After the winding down of major military operations, counterterrorism efforts would need to shift to security- and intelligence-based activities, including surveillance and reconnaissance—which

are not easy to achieve under these circumstances. This means what we're seeing is a disaggregation of the threat as IS is 'melting' into remote areas, dispersing itself across conflict-afflicted territories into a more covert guerrilla and criminal network. It is likely to be organising itself into localised or rural insurgency cells, and there are reports of assassinations, kidnappings for ransom and the targeting of local leaders.<sup>3</sup>

This illustrates how IS is playing a long game as it's striving to adjust to new realities through a strategy of revolutionary warfare that sees it transitioning through cycles of unconventional and conventional operations in response to changing conditions on the ground: 'Sixteen years of constant evolution while pressured by the world's greatest counterterrorism units has produced an organization tailored for perpetual war ...'<sup>4</sup>

Developments over the past 12 months make it clear that the group has morphed into a less centralised movement seeking to operate from various regional centres such as Africa and South/Central Asia or Southeast Asia. In this way, IS has shifted to maintaining basic guerrilla capabilities in Syria and Iraq, while at the same time trying to build up or influence affiliates transnationally. Making provisions for its losses, it is actively seeking to expand its geographical reach. As the April 2019 video of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi shows, the group is pitching a message of steadfastness to its supporters, focusing on its new 'provinces' and thereby projecting an image of strength and continuity despite setbacks.<sup>5</sup>

What this demonstrates is that military defeat is often temporal, highlighting the group's capabilities in strategic adaption and operational reorientation. The term 'post-caliphate period' should therefore be taken with a grain of salt, keeping in mind that this refers to the immediate post-territorial phase alone, in which IS is managing to successfully decouple its 'caliphate' brand from its actual territory in the Middle East. This includes an enhanced focus on external operations, as IS needs visual proof through 'propaganda of the deed' attacks in order to demonstrate its post-territorial relevance. As one analyst observed, IS's 'global network of attackers in reality may resemble less a vast, tentacled secret organization and more Internet-connected ... members trying to show semi-competent strangers how to connect wires'.<sup>6</sup> Yet, as the Sri Lanka bombings have sadly illustrated, the threat emanating from this new network is still deadly and difficult to predict.

A critical examination of the status and possible trajectory of the *Salafi-jihadi* movement is therefore necessary in order to arrive at a realistic conceptualisation of the threat. While some commentators warn of the consequences of overinflating it, others are concerned that the ongoing threat from jihadism isn't being taken seriously enough.

Concurrently, it has often been argued that territorial losses would accentuate IS's commitment to establish a 'virtual caliphate' with the aim of encouraging identification with a transnational 'imagined community' in which attacks are predominantly planned and coordinated through online forums. While this is an interesting concept, it should not be overextended at the neglect of understanding IS's enduring strategic aims in the geopolitical sphere.<sup>7</sup> The long-term objective of the global jihadist movement is still military expansion in order to impose its version of a political order—which is intimately linked to establishing (some sort of) a physical foothold. Those parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia where IS militants and other affiliated groups seek to take advantage of ungoverned spaces and establish new footholds can't be neglected. Consequently, while IS, in the wake of territorial losses, has certainly shifted some of its efforts for planning external operations online, the virtual realm should not be seen as a major battlespace.

The number of jihadists worldwide has been estimated by a recent Center for Strategic and International Studies report to be at an all-time high, possibly up to 230,000, yet nuance is required in assessing these numbers. As more jihadists now act locally, rather than presenting a coherently organized transnational threat, it is argued that overestimating their capability would result in ill-devised and unfocused policy responses:

How we define the scope of the Salafi-jihadist problem dictates the scope of the policy response and the priority it requires ... There is no standing army of 230,000 Salafi-jihadists—or even one with the report's low-end estimate of 100,000—around the world. Fighting as if there were would mean a counterterrorism campaign that is unfocused, clumsy and counterproductive. Seeing 'Salafi-jihadist' enemies everywhere is a recipe for an endless, unwinnable global war.<sup>8</sup>

This draws attention to the importance of appreciating the complexities inherent in the global *jihadi* movement, with a particular emphasis on local contexts and separating transnational from local aims. In order to appreciate the finer aspects of ‘root causes’ beyond an abstract understanding, this also involves being mindful of cross-ideological alliances, examining how various *jihadi* groups infiltrate communities and build influence.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, insurgent organisations are under pressure to strategically weigh up political, ideological and organisational objectives against counterterrorism efforts in order to ensure survivability. Changes in the overall course, operational structure and inner dynamics of insurgent groups therefore should be observed carefully; they have considerable implications for intelligence and counterterrorism practitioners seeking to understand their future objectives.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, it’s also important to consider that there are varying levels of adherence to the *jihadi* cause—and even how the cause is interpreted. Many adherents choose not to take up arms at all, playing a supporting role or only endorsing local causes—such as resistance to Bashar al-Assad in Syria, distancing themselves from indiscriminate violence and attacks on the West.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, it is vital to be nuanced in how we categorise and classify threats, being mindful that definitions and framings carry consequences in the policymaking world because discourse frames set the parameters for debate. As post-9/11 notions of a ‘global order under permanent threat’ are accompanied by extensive technological expansion, this adds to the perceived ubiquity of threats. Accordingly, we can witness a proliferation of security issues that ‘normalise’ perceived threats. Such a securitisation discourse can easily lead to a routinisation of previously exceptional security measures.<sup>12</sup> The importance of getting classifications and terminology right extends especially to new labels that are easily picked up and disseminated without further intellectual scrutiny as to whether they can actually be applied to designate a new trend. The ill-defined and overhyped threat of ‘cyber terrorism’ constitutes a salient example; as a recent study on IS’s cyber capabilities found, ‘threat assessments and predictions of the capabilities of these actors frequently rely on “what-if” scenarios, overestimate technical skill, and conflate multiple, separate cyber activities.’<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, now widely shared conceptualisations such as ‘lone actor’ and ‘self-radicalisation’ also should be understood as contested categories that should not be used uncritically but warrant further investigation into the extent of their applicability.<sup>14</sup> The same need for thorough, context-specific analysis extends to the so-called ‘crime–terror nexus’—a phenomenon denoting a convergence between criminal organisations and terrorism tactics:

[A]n individual’s criminality can affect his process of radicalization and how he operates once radicalized. The Islamic State’s recent propaganda suggests that the group is aware of this reality. It has positively framed the crime–terror nexus by encouraging crime “as a form of worship,” and has been lauding those from criminal backgrounds. This has been reflected on the streets of Europe, where perpetrators have used their criminal “skills” to make them more effective terrorists. *While understanding of the crime–terror nexus has developed, there are many knowledge gaps that have practical implications for countering terrorism* [emphasis added].<sup>15</sup>

This highlights the importance of understanding a phenomenon in its breadth and across different contexts. In the case of the crime–terror nexus, it has for example been highlighted that there are qualitative differences in how these convergences manifest across different regions—conversely impacting how to best tackle associated processes of radicalisation and decisions to support political violence.<sup>16</sup> The crime–terror nexus in a conflict context, in which organised crime and illicit economies are used to fund terror activities, takes on a different nature than in Western societies where the criminal backgrounds of recruits serve as a catalyst for seeking redemption through terrorism.

In summary, identifying those ‘knowledge gaps that have practical implications for countering terrorism’ is crucial. Often, failures of the imagination lead to an underestimation of the multilayered nature of terrorist phenomena. A nuanced, context-specific approach is therefore key to avoiding overgeneralisations and policy responses that don’t correspond to the reality—which is most often more granular and complex than commonly assumed.



# DIALOGUE OPENING SPEECHES

(Condensed and edited speeches delivered at the opening reception of the dialogue.)

**Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, then Assistant Minister for Home Affairs, now Minister for Defence.**



Photo: Fusion Photography

The fact this is the fourth dialogue of its kind is testimony to two things: the *enduring success* of this event; and its *value* as a forum in bringing together people with a shared determination to manage a great evil of our times.

Terrorism is one of the most serious, enduring and evolving threats we all face. In the 21st century, it is a challenge for us all. When attacks occur, they can be devastating economically, socially and psychologically. In 2016, the global economic impact of terrorism was US\$84 billion.

Today, the threat of terrorism in Australia is multifaceted. It is one we face at both a transnational and a national level, from those radicalised abroad and at home. It is why, since September 2014, the national terrorism threat level was raised to and remains at 'PROBABLE'.

Since 2012, around 230 Australians have travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight for or support Islamic extremist groups. These Australians are part of the 40,000 or so foreign fighters—including around 7,500 from Western countries—who have travelled to the region since the conflict began. Many thousands have died in the fighting. Others have left the conflict—for home or third countries.

The transnational challenge is twofold. One: ensuring that we prevent homegrown radicalised citizens and residents who have developed an intent to fight for ISIL, or other groups, to leave Australia. And two: ensuring we do not allow seasoned foreign fighters to return to Australia free to radicalise others, or use their warfare experience and the skills they have acquired to carry out an attack on Australian soil.

I know the German Government appreciates the seriousness of this global challenge, having co-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution 2396 (2017) on returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters.

At a national level, we are having to grapple with those driven to extremism within our borders. Such radicalisation can occur at the individual or group level. People can become indoctrinated through their own agency, or by the influence of others. It can take place online—through a person being exposed to extremist material on the internet. And it can take place in society—by those few wicked and repugnant individuals who prey on the vulnerable; who use propaganda to recruit people to their extremist cause. Over the past 17 years, 55 people have been convicted of terrorism-related offences. And over the past four years, there have been six attacks and 14 major counterterrorism disruption operations in response to potential attack planning in Australia. Moreover, 90 people have been charged as a result of 40 counterterrorism-related operations around Australia.

My government has been committed to developing a number of *tools* to manage the terrorism threat. Last year, the Home Affairs portfolio was established, and Australia's domestic security and law enforcement capabilities have been brought together. To protect and secure Australia in the 21st century, we have to increasingly operate beyond and ahead of our borders; that is, within international networks, supply chains and cyberspace. And that means operating more collaboratively—harnessing capabilities and expertise both inside and outside government.

Working with intelligence, law enforcement, security and policy agencies at the state, federal and international levels, Home Affairs has the central responsibility for our counterterrorism effort and is driving a stronger and more strategic response. The portfolio is as far-reaching as it is necessary. It supports the states and territories, which are on the front line of Australia's domestic counterterrorism response, to ensure they have the capabilities they need to investigate and disrupt terrorism. Federal, state and territory police work together with our intelligence agencies in joint counterterrorism teams around the country. The Australian Government is invested in this truly national response.

We have also introduced a Bill to give the ADF an enhanced ability to support state and territory police in responding to incidents of significant violence in Australia—including terrorism.

One of the most significant counterterrorism challenges we face is managing the foreign fighter phenomenon. The cessation of Australian citizenship of dual nationals engaged in terrorist activities offshore is a crucial component in Australia's counterterrorism toolbox. To date, six individuals fighting for or supporting ISIL offshore have ceased to be Australian citizens. The government has also provided \$6.9 million to continue the Airline Liaison Officers network. These staff work in overseas embarkation points to screen people seeking to enter Australia, supporting our capacity to detect, deter and disrupt threats before they reach the border.

The government is preventing further Australians from travelling overseas to join conflicts and terrorist groups. We have cancelled or refused around 240 Australian passports in relation to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Additionally, we have bolstered the capabilities of counter-terrorism unit teams deployed across Australia's major international airports. And, of course, advance passenger processing operates at check-in overseas and onshore. It verifies whether a person holds a valid visa or relevant authority to travel to and enter or depart Australia. On the subject of airport security, the international aviation sector remains an alluring target for terrorists.

In July last year, Australia narrowly avoided a sophisticated terrorist attack. A group of men, inspired by Islamic extremism, were involved in a plot to smuggle an improvised explosive device onto an Etihad A380 flight out of Sydney.

We are investing almost \$294 million in a range of initiatives to strengthen security at airports, as well as mail and air cargo facilities. We are upgrading old and implementing sophisticated new screening technology at Australia's major and regional airports. Additionally, through a specialised training package, we will enhance the skills of security screeners at regional and remote airports across the country. This initiative will ensure that screening officers across the network are trained in the most sophisticated threat detection techniques. And we are introducing new laws to give the Australian Federal Police powers to conduct identity checks at airports, and to order a person to 'move on' from airport premises where they pose a criminal or security threat.

Furthermore, the National Facial Biometric Matching Capability will support our security and law enforcement agencies to identify people who are suspects or victims of terrorist or other criminal activity. And it will also prevent the use of fake or stolen identities.

The cyber realm has not escaped our attention. While encryption enhances our cybersecurity, it is also being exploited by terrorists to conceal their activities from our authorities, especially the planning and executing of attacks. Tellingly, 95% of ASIO's most dangerous counterterrorism targets use encrypted communications, and encryption affects intelligence coverage in nine out of 10 priority cases.<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, the government has developed the Assistance and Access Bill. Once passed, the legislation will assist law enforcement and intelligence agencies to access specific communications, without compromising the security of a network. Importantly, the legislation does not permit so-called 'backdoors' or mass surveillance. There will be no weakening of encryption.<sup>18</sup> And robust measures will ensure individual privacy is protected and cybersecurity safeguarded.<sup>19</sup> The reforms are about targeted access to information—with a warrant, via a lawful process, and for national security purposes.<sup>20</sup> Australia's law enforcement and national security agencies routinely receive assistance from the large tech companies.<sup>21</sup> So the premise of this legislation is not new. It will allow us to keep pace with emerging technologies to protect Australians from harm.<sup>22</sup>

The growing trend towards low-capability terrorist threats presents ongoing challenges with regard to detecting and disrupting the financing of terrorism. The increased use of nonconventional financing methods—such as digital currencies, stored value cards and crowdfunding platforms—makes it harder to detect terrorism financing. Since 2006, Australia has convicted 11 people for terrorism financing offences.<sup>23</sup>

AUSTRAC—our financial intelligence agency—continues to implement appropriate regulations and enforcement measures. It produces intelligence to better understand the flow of funds to support terrorism.<sup>24</sup> In March last year, AUSTRAC launched the Fintel Alliance. This public-private sector collaboration has strengthened our ability to identify, disrupt and deter money laundering and terrorism financing.

I am grateful that, as members of the Financial Action Task Force and Egmont Group, Germany and Australia continue to work together to counter the flow of funds to terrorist organisations.

Of course, law enforcement operations alone cannot reduce the risk of terrorism. Once an individual is indoctrinated, the ability to prevent a terrorist act becomes much more difficult. Our countering violent extremism (CVE) strategy is multifaceted. We are collaborating with the digital sector and regulatory agencies to take down violent extremist material, inhibit the spread of terrorist propaganda and prevent the grooming of young people. We facilitate training for people working in local communities, the education sector, multicultural and youth affairs, and the mental health profession to address radicalisation.

And we are working with prisons and corrective services to implement programs to identify, manage and rehabilitate high-risk and terrorist offenders who are imprisoned, including in the juvenile justice system. I congratulate Dr Krings and the German Government for expanding funding for your existing CVE programs last year.



Make no mistake, the menace of 21st century terrorism cannot be managed by government alone. It requires partnerships at several levels—with the states and territories, with our international partners and with industry and business. Public-private sector collaboration is core to our counterterrorism response and is reflected in Australia's Strategy for Protecting Crowded Places from Terrorism, which was released on 20 August last year.<sup>25</sup> It is predicated on the basis that protecting crowded places requires a strong and sustainable partnership with the private security sector. The private security sector has a central role in countering terrorism, with direct responsibilities for strengthening the security of crowded places. Indeed, private security personnel are often the first responders to a terrorist incident. Through initiatives such as the Australia – New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee's Business Advisory Group forum, we are working to ensure that the owners and operators of crowded places are properly informed of, and prepared to respond to, national security issues.

Turning the telescope in another direction, the government remains concerned about the influence of groups in Southeast Asia. That includes ISIL, al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah and other regional extremist networks. The terrorist attacks last May in Surabaya and Pekanbaru, Indonesia, were not only carried out by families of women and children, but were executed using ISIL-inspired explosives.

Under this government, Australia has strengthened its collaboration with our international partners to combat the common threat of terrorism. In March, during a special summit in Sydney, leaders from Australia and ASEAN signed a historical agreement which enhances cooperation to counter international terrorism. In testimony to their fine work, Indonesian authorities have successfully disrupted many potential attacks and made numerous arrests. Together, Australia and Indonesia are already promoting world best practice in CVE as part of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum. We have also established an Australia-Indonesia Strong Borders Program to bolster security capabilities, including to interdict potential counter terrorism threats at the border.

And I know Dr Krings and I are eager for Germany and Australia to build on our existing counterterrorism endeavours to drive back tenacious terrorists.

To conclude, Islamist terrorism is not the only form of terrorism nations face—but it is the most dominant. It is rejected by the vast majority of Australian Muslims. It is extremist behaviour which peaceful Australian Muslims condemn and rally against. Regrettably, it is also terrorism which has spawned a *secondary* issue. That is, several individuals and extremist groups threatening or attacking Australia's Muslim community—something we are seeing around the world. This government strongly and unreservedly condemns anyone who incites violence and hatred within our community. Within our political and public debate, however, there have been those who claim this form of terrorism has *nothing* to do with Islam. As I said, Islamist terrorism is carried out by those motivated by the worst possible and most destructive interpretations of the religion. To deny that fact is to ignore reality. And to ignore reality is to take backward steps to addressing this transnational issue.

The enduring evil of terrorism can only be repelled by working together. Collaboration is our most effective tool.

## Professor Dr Günter Krings (Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community)



Photo: Fusion Photography

The so-called Islamic State (IS) has been defeated militarily, yet Islamist terrorism remains the number one threat to European societies. The atrocious terror attacks we have had to witness over the past three years have proven that international terror organisations are targeting the European way of life. Their hate and their contempt for humanity have not vanished with the downfall of the so-called caliphate. They will continue their attempts to attack our countries, polarise our societies and challenge our liberal democratic values. The fight against terrorism, at both the national and the international levels, must therefore remain our priority to safeguard internal security.

To briefly sketch out the German view of the IS phenomenon:

The territory in Syria and Iraq that was occupied by IS was—and is—used to train terrorists in armed combat and to prepare attacks, also in Europe. The devastating attacks in Paris and Brussels are tragic examples of their work. At the same time, by occupying territory, IS was able to grow to a frightening extent. It collected taxes from the people living in the occupied territory and exploited the local resources. By the time the caliphate was declared in June 2014, the unprecedented success of its violent regime was attracting radicalised persons from all over the world. From Europe alone, roughly 5,000 mostly young people travelled to the fighting in Syria and Iraq to join IS. More than a thousand of them left from Germany. At the same time, like no other organisation before it, IS managed to package its horrific activities for media consumption. It broadcasts its highly professional videos practically in real time on countless internet channels.

This is the secret to its enormous success: IS was able to gain large numbers of sympathisers all over the world. Its professionally produced propaganda, which many find visually appealing, always has the same message: ‘The West oppresses Muslims. Muslims can never be a part of Western society. Muslims can be truly free only in a global caliphate.’ This narrative is still used in thousands and thousands of terrorist publications every day and it keeps on challenging the cohesion of our societies:

1. In addition to its ideological elements, this propaganda, with its look of video games or action films, promises heroism and adventure. And even though IS has lost almost its entire territory, its propaganda machine keeps running—though on a smaller scale due to financing problems. IS's global media presence has also led to further undesirable developments which pose enormous challenges for us: IS propaganda is no longer mainly intended to entice people to move to its self-proclaimed caliphate. IS is now increasingly pushing individuals to carry out terrorist attacks in their home countries. The radicalisation process of these 'lone wolves' often begins on the internet, unnoticed by those around them. The deadly attacks in Orlando and Nice, the axe attack on a regional train in Germany and the attempted bombing of a music festival in southern Germany two years ago all show that this strategy is working. It allows IS to take credit for such attacks without having to make any logistical effort. So it seems capable of striking other countries at any time. Such attacks are almost impossible to prevent.
2. A decentralised IS will turn even its military defeat to its advantage—terrorists, too, try to turn challenges into opportunities. As we have already seen, it will find other local and regional lines of conflict to extend its reign of terror. The developments we have seen in the Philippines are an alarming example.
3. Fear of the Islamic State and other terror militias is causing more and more people to flee their homes. Of the nearly one and a half million refugees who reached Germany in 2015 and 2016, many were fleeing IS.

In Germany's view, this creates a series of challenges: What will happen to the IS fighters? Where will they go? How can we detect and prevent their travel? How can we keep them from taking their armed struggle to other countries? And how can we keep them from continuing the armed struggle in their countries of origin, for example through terrorist attacks? What will the strategy of IS be after the end of the caliphate? Where will it get its funds? What media strategy will it pursue? The security authorities are intensively studying all these issues.

We will have to accept the fact that not only the countries in the region but Europe and the whole world will continue to face serious challenges. Highly radicalised, violent foreign fighters with combat experience could return to their countries of origin. This could stretch our security authorities to the limit unless we develop ways to deal with these fighters ahead of time. Women and children who did not actively fight for IS are already returning to Europe, and many more are waiting for an opportunity to return. The German Government recognises its responsibility for German citizens and is helping women and children get back to our country. Deradicalising these people, particularly the often traumatised children who were socialised by a terror organisation, will be a major challenge for us all. The terrorist threat in Germany has cast new light on the refugee debate. It has been instrumentalised by right-wing groups for populist purposes. Those groups increasingly conflate Islam and terrorism. The number of criminal attacks on refugee shelters rose dramatically in 2015 and 2016. The rise of right-wing populism in Europe still threatens to undermine the European process of unification.

IS will probably try even harder to smuggle terrorists into Europe and other countries and to encourage supporters to carry out individual attacks there. Individuals and smaller groups of terrorists using simple and everyday objects to carry out attacks represent a considerable threat. This is also demonstrated by the attacks carried out with vehicles, knives and axes in Europe.

However, at the same time, we must also assume that international terrorist groups continue to pursue the goal of launching a major and logistically complex attack, for example on air or railway transport, orchestrated by their organisations. The planned attack on a commercial aircraft which the Australian authorities prevented in late July of 2017 is an alarming signal in this context.

International terrorism does not stop at national borders. Each country is responsible for taking the necessary measures at home. In Germany, we have done so at various levels. We have amended our legislation in order to better apprehend and prosecute terrorists and to make it more difficult for them to travel. We have significantly reinforced our security authorities with more staff, bigger budgets and more legal powers. We have taken action to counter terrorist content online much more efficiently. And we have notably increased our efforts at deradicalisation and to prevent violent Islamist extremism, for we have learned that we will achieve lasting success only if we focus on prevention as well as law enforcement. Civil-society actors can often be much more effective than government



actors in reaching the public, so a key element of our efforts is to strengthen civil society. I am confident that we in Germany are well prepared in the fight against terrorism, in terms of security authorities and prevention. Within Europe, we are defending our free societies with a package of what I believe are effective measures. If necessary, these measures can also be applied to global cooperation.

For example:

- we have improved information sharing between security agencies
- we have adjusted our border controls
- we are making progress in the fight against terrorist financing and in regulating firearms.

Despite professional and robust action by security authorities, the fact remains that open societies are vulnerable, and that it is very hard to prevent small groups or lone actors from carrying out multiple attacks. I am sure that the idea of IS and its barbarous ideology will live on after its caliphate has ceased to exist. To defend our liberal democracy, we must fight not only the symptoms of this evil, but also its roots.

Cooperation, coordination and intensified measures to counter Islamist terrorism must not be limited to Europe. In conclusion, I would like to stress once again that we can only achieve this together:

- in the international community
- with a combination of law enforcement and prevention
- with a consistent message
- with joint efforts by the government, research community and civil society.

Fighting and ultimately overcoming terrorism and extremism is a task for the entire society of every country. The international community and Germany on the national level have achieved much in the past years, and we are well equipped for the challenge of safeguarding internal security, strengthening the cohesion of our societies, and maintaining our international partnerships.



From left to right: Dr Beatrice Gorawantschy, Director Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Regional Programme Australia and the Pacific; HE Michael Pulch, Ambassador, European Delegation to Australia; HE Dr Anna Prinz, then Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany; Dr Günter Krings, Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community; Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, then Assistant Minister for Home Affairs; and Mr Peter Jennings, Executive Director, Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Photo: Fusion Photography

# THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE *JIHADI* THREAT IN THE POST-CALIPHATE PERIOD

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## The post-caliphate ecosystem

Salafi-jihadism is a distinct ideological movement in Sunni Islam, composed of scholars, websites, media outlets, groups and individuals embracing an extremist, intolerant minoritarian reading of Islamic scripture. The movement is textually rigorous, drawing on premodern theological tradition as expounded by such men as the Syrian Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328).<sup>26</sup>

The global *Salafi-jihadi* environment is in a state of flux. The tension between al-Qaeda and ISIL remain; the two groups and their affiliates are at one level at great odds, engaging in fierce battle as they seek to dominate specific areas. And yet, at the same time, both groups recognise that they have suffered substantial military defeats, demanding that they reassess their strategies. Therefore, the best way to describe the post-caliphate ecosystem is as one of fragmentation within the global *Salafi-jihadi* community and a strategic pause by the principal actors—al-Qaeda and ISIL.

It was on 4 July 2014 that Ibrahim Awwad, better known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, stood in the pulpit at the 950-year-old Great Mosque of al-Nuri and announced that an Islamic ‘caliphate’ had been established between northern Syria and the Iraqi province of Diyala northeast of Baghdad, which included key cities such as Tal Afar, Sinjar, Falluja, Ramadi and Raqqa. The area came to be known as the Islamic State (IS) with the intention that it would serve as a launching pad for further expansion. For five years, the focus was very much with the territorial IS as the group went on to terrorise much of the Levant and to commit acts of terrorism across the world. Through an effective propaganda campaign, ISIL attracted thousands of young men and women to leave their homes and travel to the caliphate.

In July 2017, Mosul was lost to IS and, with it, claims of the end of the caliphate and of IS begun to gather momentum, even though it was to take another year before the group was pushed out of much of Syria, as many ISIL fighters opted to make strategic retreats so that they could regroup and consolidate in places such as Hajin in Syria, where they dug in, buried large quantities of cash and weapons, and dug tunnels that allowed them to move from house to house.<sup>27</sup> And yet, despite assessments by the US Department of Defense<sup>28</sup> and the UN<sup>29</sup> that ISIL could continue to rely on between 20,000 and 30,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria and countless others in Africa, Asia and beyond, some policymakers felt confident enough to declare that the group that had terrorised more than 12 million people in an area larger than the UK was defeated.<sup>30</sup> Thus, while ISIL once claimed to administer well over 30 so-called *wilayats* (provinces) in 2019, it controls but a handful.<sup>31</sup> Concomitantly, places such as Somalia, the Philippines and Indonesia, which failed to secure the status of official branches of the territorial IS, were granted formal titles such as *wilayah* of Somalia and *wilayah* of East Asia, though what real command and control the ISIL leadership has over these entities is disputed.

Clearly, ISIL is far from defeated. The Secretary-General of Interpol, Jürgen Stock, has declared that the danger that ISIL poses remains ‘immediate, complex and more international than ever’. Stock added that there’s evidence of continued movement of hardened ISIL fighters to and from conflict zones (Interpol’s database on foreign terrorist fighters has over 50,000 names; in 2012, it had only 13).<sup>32</sup>

Al-Qaeda has quietly been rebuilding its brand and establishing beachheads in key areas. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden’s successor, implemented a strategy based on four pillars. First, Zawahiri doesn’t demand that groups ‘buy in’ to the al-Qaeda model. Whereas under bin Laden it was harder for certain groups to join the al-Qaeda network, Zawahiri has shown more flexibility, adopting a franchising strategy whereby individuals and groups needn’t swear sole allegiance to al-Qaeda, nor come under the specific command of the al-Qaeda Council.<sup>33</sup> This part of the strategy is important because it emphasises that al-Qaeda is patient; it’s willing to support local conflicts and campaigns that might not necessarily immediately advance its overall goal of re-establishing the 7th-century caliphate, but rather niggles and torment national governments, encouraging them to adopt oppressive tactics that help feed the al-Qaeda narrative that only under truly Islamic governance can Muslims be free of tyranny.

The second pillar has seen al-Qaeda abandon mass-casualty terrorism attacks, or at least not carry out such attacks in Western states. Nevertheless, the franchising strategy makes it acceptable for proxies or franchisees to carry out such operations, as was the case with the 2016 Paris attack, which was carried out by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or the 2019 al-Shabaab attack on the DusitD2 Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya.

The third pillar is reliance on end-to-end encryption technology that allows for secure communication. Al-Qaeda has recognised that the technological revolution has enabled it to easily acquire off-the-shelf digital communications products that *Salafi-jihadis* can use to engage in secure communication. Over the past few years, jihadists have begun to develop their own software, especially when it was rumoured that the US National Security Agency had managed to compromise the Tor browser.<sup>34</sup> This has greatly empowered the group, allowing it to communicate more easily.

Fourth, Zawahiri dispatched key lieutenants to Syria, Iran, Turkey, Libya, Yemen and other locations to help build and solidify cells and entities that are interested in the al-Qaeda ideology. The purpose was for those individuals to provide new connections and technical skills, help to manage resources, and at times bridge parochial divisions.

This strategy has paid dividends, leading scholars such as Bruce Hoffman to declare the resurrection and resurgence of al-Qaeda, making the organisation and its affiliates ‘the world’s top terrorist threat’.<sup>35</sup>

### Fragmentation within the *Salafi-jihadi* community

The roots of ISIL lie with Ahmad Fadeel al-Nazal al-Khalayleh, better known as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who established the *Tawhid and Jihad* movement in the early 2000s (in 1999, Zarqawi whom bin Laden distrusted and disliked, was given around US\$5,000 to set up a training camp outside Herat, which by October 2001 had between 2,000 and 3,000 people living in it).

Zarqawi, a self-described *jihadi*, traced his roots to the Bani Hassan tribe (a Bedouin tribe), and initially set up a group named *Jund al-Sham* (Soldiers of the Levant), composed of Syrians who had fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Zarqawi revolutionised the *Salafi-jihadi* cause by infusing a level of brutality and bloodshed that included a bombing of the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad (7 August 2003), which was followed 12 days later by another car bomb, this time against the UN headquarters in Baghdad, which claimed 22 lives. In August 2003, Zarqawi also sent his father-in-law, Yassin Jarad, to blow up a truck full of explosives in a crowd near the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf, Iraq, killing more than 80 people, including Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim. In October 2004, leading a new group called *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad), Zarqawi finally paid *bayat* (took an oath of allegiance) to Osama bin Laden, mainly because of internal pressure from within his group (Zarqawi also declared himself Emir of al-Qaeda’s Operations in the Land of Mesopotamia).<sup>36</sup>

Zarqawi's brutal and horrific actions led to a letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri in July 2005 chiding the Jordanian national for his tactics. The letter augmented the differences between bin Laden and his vision and that of Zarqawi. For bin Laden, al-Qaeda was a vanguard organisation of the enlightened representing a big-trend ideology, aimed at facilitating cooperation with many militant groups all committed to the same goal, which meant that bin Laden would tolerate dissent and differences. Zarqawi, on the other hand, had a more binary conception of good/bad Muslims, and was willing to accept those who shared his vision. Organisationally, there were also substantive differences between al-Qaeda and Zarqawi, in that bin Laden didn't wish to preside over a large group (on 9/11, al-Qaeda had around 200 members), whereas Zarqawi wanted to amass a large army.<sup>37</sup> The letter, which was made public by the US Director of National Intelligence, highlighted the differences between Zawahiri and Zarqawi, which were eventually to lead to a split between al-Qaeda and Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). AQI was the precursor to ISIL, and this eventually led to a formal split as AQI shifted to Syria.

On 15 October 2006, a rather nebulous group known as the *Mujahidin Shura Council*, which was formed by AQI with five other *Salafi-jihadi* groups, issued a statement declaring the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq under the leadership of Hamid Dawud al-Zawi (aka, Omar al-Baghdadi). The declaration angered many *Salafi-jihadis* who felt that the time hadn't come to make such a proclamation.<sup>38</sup>

Between 2006 and 2011, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) had very limited influence in Iraq (on 18 April 2010, US and Iraqi forces raided a house in near Tikrit, killing Abu Umar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, two of the principal actors in ISI). They were replaced by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu Muhammad al-Adnani (whose real name is Tah Subhi Falaha). Baghdadi and Adnani were able to exploit Sunni anger at the sectarian policies of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, which led to a recruitment bonanza for ISI.<sup>39</sup> Nine of the men (Baghdadi, Abu Muslim al-Turkmani, Haji Bakr, Abu Qasim, etc.) who were to form the nucleus of what was to become the territorial IS had spent time in Camp Bucca, which at one point housed 100,000 detainees.<sup>40</sup>

The decision to declare the formation of an Islamic State in Iraq, whether in 2006 or in 2014 underlined two major differences between adherents to the ISIL module and those subscribing to the al-Qaeda brand. First, it led to a conceptualisation problem. There were debates about what the ISI was: was it a *de facto* state, a movement that could and would absorb others, or a terrorist group? The view was that the Islamic State isn't a static concept but one that's constantly evolving, as it's an organic entity adapting to the environment and conditions around it. Second, even though ISIL thrives on eschatological, apocalyptic, conspiratorial and hagiographical concepts, it fundamentally draws recruits from those who have many social and economic grievances. ISIL, as the world's wealthiest terrorist group, could provide its recruits with wealth that in turn would provide for basic security and more.

The fragmentation within the *Salafi-jihadi* architecture is especially visible within ISIL and is taking place along theological lines. The debate is being played out on Telegram, where two clear camps are emerging, best understood as extremist and mainstream/dissenters. The debate is over the issue of takfirism—declaring someone be non-Muslim, which can carry the death penalty. The mainstream camp, which is moderate on the issue of takfirism and is supported by dissenters such as Turki al-Binali and Abu Muhammad al-Husseini al-Hashimi, has rejected the view that takfirism is a core principle in Islam. Second, these individuals recognise that there is no absolute takfirism, raising the prospect of nullifiers such as ignorance as a way to limit pronouncements. There is an extremist view, represented on Telegram through the *al-Nadhir al-Uryan* channel and the one-time head of IS's *Diwan al-Ilam al-Markazi* (media department), Abu Hakim, that identifies takfirism as a principle of Islam, negating all nullifiers. Under the absolutist stance, not only must one decry and identify *takfiris*, but failure to do so turns one into a *takfir*.<sup>41</sup> The implications of the debate are significant: should the hardline wing win, that may involve a more aggressive, violent military campaign that could lead to many more attacks.



### The *Salafi-jihadi* environment in the post-caliphate period in Australia, Europe and Southeast Asia

It has become abundantly clear that Australia, Europe and Southeast Asia face similar challenges from Salafi-jihadism and the threat posed by groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIL and their affiliates and franchisees.

First, one of the major challenges faced by states is to ascertain the numbers, vitality and purpose of *Salafi-jihadis*. A recent study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, for example, identified around 230,000 *jihadis* around the world. The study didn't attempt to assess how many supporters of and sympathisers with Salafi-jihadism there are, as such a task is likely to be impossible. The importance of this observation is that, over the past three years, the phenomenon of ISIL-inspired attacks has reached new heights through individuals who don't seem to have any direct links to ISIL committing attacks with knives, guns or vehicles. For example, 80% of convictions for terrorism offences in Australia have occurred in the past three years, and many of those convicted have been under the age of 21 years.<sup>42</sup>

A second challenge is that, even though the caliphate had ceased to exist by 2018, many foreign fighters fled or sought to return to their countries of origin. Many of these people are battle-tested, committed ideologues who opted to stay with ISIL even though they knew that the caliphate was under enormous pressure.

Third, states are having to recognise that many committed *Salafi-jihadis* who were jailed for seeking to travel to the caliphate for committing acts of terrorism are facing the prospect of release. Additionally, there are many foreign fighters being held by Iraqi forces and such entities as the Syrian Democratic Forces. This therefore means that states face two principal challenges. First, what to do with convicted terrorists within their own domestic jurisdictions who have seen out their sentences. Second, what to do with their nationals who are being held by foreign entities.

Thus, at a time when the principal proponents of Salafi-jihadism are undergoing an ideological and strategic reassessment, it is important to understand what continues to feed their narrative.

### New initiatives and approaches to countering online radicalisation and the crime–terror nexus

Due to the advances of modern technology, it is easy to spread news, information, articles and other information over the Internet. We strongly urge Muslim Internet professionals to spread and disseminate news and information about the Jihad through e-mail lists, discussion groups, and their own websites. If you fail to do this, and our site closes down before you have done this, you may be held to account before Allah on the Day of Judgment ... This way, even if our sites are closed down, the material will live on with the Grace of Allah

—Al-Qaeda's internet strategy<sup>43</sup>

The issue of radicalisation and deradicalisation has generated a robust discussion about concepts and processes. It's increasingly recognised that the process of radicalisation occurs via the internet, which poses an even greater challenge to those trying to counter the phenomenon of radicalisation, especially when one contrasts the resources devoted to deradicalisation with the pool of vulnerable and radicalised individuals.

The consensus that emerged was that adequately addressing the multifaceted issue of radicalisation requires a whole-of-government approach that involves not only the security services but also health workers, social workers, youth workers, educators, civil society organisations, community activists and families. To understand the world of the radicalised requires an appreciation of patterns in language—specifically of semantics, which provides an insight into the pull and push factors that lead to violent extremism.

In untangling the discourse on radicalisation, it remains a truism that 18 years after 9/11 'radicalisation' remains a contested term. Some see it as a 'process' that culminates in preparation for or commitment to intergroup violence, whereas others regard it as the decision to embrace extremist ideas that are in conflict with liberal democratic values while calling for far-reaching changes to society that might or might not lead to violent action.

There are also substantive differences on the preconditions and precipitants of radicalisation. Some theories focus on the role of external radicalisers, who are often recruiters for terrorist group or religious figures with extremist sympathies (a top-down approach). Others take the view that radicalisation begins with an individual's interaction in physical social networks (bottom-up theories). A third contested area in the realm of radicalisation is between the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs and action pathways (or action scripts), which is the process of engaging in terrorism or violent extremist action.

There is a general agreement that violent extremism isn't a product of psychiatric disorders, although mental health problems can be exploited by sage recruiters.

Research indicates that many of those who turn to violent extremism do so because they've decided that it serves as the most effective way to address an injustice. The individual engages in social, political, economic and religious assessments; lateral thinking; and economic opportunities. Additionally, the person goes through a process of rationalisation, through which they defend, explain and justify their use of violence. Included in the process is a cost-benefit analysis.<sup>44</sup>

In sum, research and experience suggest that when looking at the radicalised person it's useful to get an understanding of identity; group loyalties; feelings of state marginalisation, discrimination, or injustice; opportunities to engage in extremism; and hope of reward for doing so. Those are all risk factors for involvement in violent extremism.<sup>45</sup>

## The typology of recruitment

Passive recruitment takes place through events that occur in the life of the individual and make them interested in bringing about radical changes. The events needn't be something that the individual had sought out, but may be the result of something that they experience in their lives that feeds their real or perceived grievances.

Active recruitment takes place when the individual either seeks out or is contacted by a recruiter or a committed radical who wishes to push them further along in the radicalisation process. The process involves the individual engaging more with a committed community of radicals, all of which is aimed at persuading and convincing them that the only answer to their grievance is violence. Acts of politically motivated violence and terrorism are the final step, in which the individual takes up violence to bring about the radical change they desire.

### 'Lone actor' activity and online radicalisation

Over the past decade, a new wave of terrorist activity has emerged based on lone actors—people whose radicalisation has taken place not through physical interaction with a specific recruiter but rather through a process that is best understood as self-radicalisation. The key to the process is access to online materials, which has led some to suggest that what's occurring is a fifth wave of terrorism inspired by the social media revolution<sup>46</sup> and based on the presence of an enormous amount of content both violent and benign (IS doesn't just distribute violent material to attract recruits, but also disseminates non-violent material aimed at promoting a view of the caliphate as a paradise).

Additionally, a second important component in the online radicalisation process is the role of social networking radicalisers who latch on to vulnerable individuals, feeding their grievance narrative while also offering them a community, understanding and support.

### Providing security in an era of encrypted communications

Violent extremists are technology-savvy.

Whether we look to Andreas Breivik or Brendan Tarrant or ISIL, the extremist is committed to 'the cause', which means they'll quickly adapt to new media structures and *avant-garde* ways of communicating. The need to adapt stems from the fact that terrorism is a communicative act: it's 'propaganda by the deed'.

There are many issues relating to technology and the dissemination of extremist content, beginning with the nature of the world wide web, which is largely unregulated space in much of the world, as that was the intention of its inventor, Sir Tim Berners-Lee. Moreover, over time, to avoid the dominance of large tech and media companies, platforms such as 4chan, 8chan and Reddit have emerged. They eschew a regulatory regime and in doing so have come to feed a culture that rejects modernity, attracting members who fetishise a sense of what masculinity is or should be (the 2014 Gamergate controversy is indicative of this ecosystem).<sup>47</sup>

Tech and social media companies have pursued special-purpose hardware and software to prevent violent extremists using their platforms. One such product is Google's Tensor Processing Unit, which is aimed at improving the relevance of search results and possibly preventing individuals from quickly finding extremist content.

However, while machine learning and artificial intelligence might help, we can't rely on them to solve the problem of individuals uploading extremist content because the content is often subjective—it isn't always easy to ascertain what is extremist or radical. Second, there's so much of the material. Third, extremists know how to exploit the platforms. For example, when Twitter attempted to purge ISIL members and supporters from its platform, the response was the creation of multiple accounts or the altering of existing account handles. The followers were still able to 'rediscover' the old accounts, whereas the algorithm struggled.

It's also useful to point to two cases to illustrate the challenge of removing violent content and extremists from social media.

The first example is that of Samata Ullah, a British national convicted in the UK of membership of ISIL. He was also convicted of training and preparing for terrorist acts. Ullah was accused of creating a 'one-stop shop' of information for terrorists and terrorist wannabes. What he did was to advise and educate others on the importance of not storing information on their computers but rather using USBs. He also created instructional videos on how to secure information, how to remain anonymous, and how to use Tor and PGP (pretty good privacy) encryption. Ullah also created at least 50 email addresses and had nine phone numbers. When he was arrested, police found eight terabytes of data.<sup>48</sup>

A second example is that of Paul Golding and Jayda Fransen, who are key leaders of the far-right British group, Britain First. When Twitter banned the two, Golding and Fransen encouraged their followers to migrate to Gab, which is a private social network based in Texas.<sup>49</sup>

## Prisons and the influence of Salafist networks

The effective management of imprisoned extremists is proving to be one of the biggest challenges for governments, as those people are indeed high risk. The quandary faced by governments is twofold. First, how to deal with the people while they're incarcerated; second, what to do with them once they complete their sentences. Notably, dealing with prisoners and their radicalisation isn't a new phenomenon. For centuries, governments have recognised that placing people in prison raises the prospects of some offenders using their time to propagate extremist ideas.

Terrorists jailed for criminal activities have shown that they can thrive in the prison environment. Savvy offenders use their time to spot, assess and encourage potential recruits from a steadily regenerating pool of potential recruits. Prisons tend to be overcrowded, chaotic and under-resourced, which often means that charismatic leaders can identify vulnerable offenders and recruit them. Additionally, the hypermasculine culture in many prisons facilitates the development of terrorist networks, which are often based on the ability to assert dominance and power (a 'them versus us' mentality) while living in an environment that demands secrecy.

There are two principal methods for dealing with those convicted of terrorism offences: segregation and isolation, which has led to the establishment of specialised prison units (SPUs), or inclusion in the general prison population, which may come with certain restrictions. Both approaches call for the involvement of experts in helping to deradicalise the individual or to disengage them from violent extremism.

In jurisdictions that adopted the SPU model, attempts have been made to balance security concerns with rehabilitative efforts. The first part of the segregation approach is predicated on the assumption that by isolating the offender one limits their ability to communicate and propagate their ideas, whether within the prison population or beyond. It also makes it harder for offenders to plan future terrorist attacks, as seen in the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attack. Two of the attackers—Amédy Coulibaly and Chérif Kouachi—met at the Fleury-Mérogis prison, where they came under the influence of Djamel Beghal, who was serving a 10-year sentence for trying to bomb the American Embassy in Paris.<sup>50</sup>

### Deradicalisation programs in prisons

Concern over radicalisation in prison, coupled with a growing population of individuals convicted of terrorism offences, has led to the development of a plethora of deradicalisation programs. Most of the academic work in this field is either descriptive or theoretical.

Indonesia has experimented with prison deradicalisation using programs with four principal elements, although implementation has been questionable. Nevertheless, in theory, the Indonesian approach begins with isolating those offenders who are participating in deradicalisation programs. Second, it aims to provide practical incentives for prisoners to join the programs, such as better conditions or offers of economic assistance to the prisoners and their families. Third, it's based on using former terrorists to engage directly with the prisoners on an ideological and theological basis, exploring such issues as whether violence is justified. Fourth, part of this approach is running workshops aimed at dealing with anger management but also workshops that provide the offenders with skills that they can use once they complete their sentences. Additionally, the program strives to help offenders develop new social relationship networks free from their previous associations.<sup>51</sup>

In June 2017, \$47 million was allocated to New South Wales prisons to improve the capacity and capabilities of Corrective Services New South Wales (CSNSW) to address radicalisation in prisons. Since 2003, Corrective Services has developed a set of CVE strategies in its prisons, which means that most inmates charged with or convicted of national security offences are placed in the High-Risk Management Correctional Centre.<sup>52</sup>

Over the past few years, several models have emerged to deal with individuals convicted of terrorism offences. The [Sri Lanka Government's rehabilitation program](#) is predicated on the ability to separate moderate and extremist members of the Tamil Tigers. After that, the program seeks to provide offenders with a sense of worth, which includes no longer referring to them as a 'prisoner' or 'detainee' but rather as a 'beneficiary'. The individual is encouraged to undertake spiritually based activities that promote non-violent individual expression and the development of a sense of self-worth. An additional component is providing vocational education courses aimed at facilitating the reintegration of the 'beneficiary' into society by ensuring that they can work.<sup>53</sup>

### Concern over recidivism

There's increased concern over recidivism among violent extremist ex-prisoners and returned foreign fighters, especially among those who have either not undertaken any deradicalisation program or have shown no interest in rehabilitation.

Research on post-release and probation programs for those convicted of terrorism offences has been limited, and there's clearly more that needs to be done in this space.<sup>54</sup> One of the issues that we face is that there's a tendency to see those convicted of terrorism and terrorism-related offences as a homogeneous group, when in fact it is not. In Australia, for example, scholars have identified three separate waves of terrorists, with different motivations, educations and ages.<sup>55</sup> Not recognising the disaggregated nature of the community of offenders makes it harder to aid in rehabilitation but also in recognising that some may be more willing to participate in disengagement policies, whereas others may be committed ideologues.



## Conclusions

The 4th ASPI–KAS dialogue underlined the fact that both Australia and Germany are facing many similar security challenges in the post-caliphate period, as the threat posed by ISIL and other *Salafi-jihadi* groups is likely to remain. There was also a consensus that the threat posed by the ideology behind them is likely to remain and possibly even grow, especially in the online space. Moreover, the participants accepted that the groups will seek new safe havens from which they'll continue to disseminate their ideas and recruit new members to either travel to join them or, more probably, to commit attacks in their home countries.

The dialogue underlined the enormous challenge that states will face with returning foreign fighters, but also with prison radicalisation. As the dust settles on the caliphate and as order descends on the many official and unofficial refugee camps that have cropped up in Iraq, Jordan, Kurdistan, Turkey and Syria, it's likely that states and NGOs will be able to assess the magnitude of the problem that has emerged with children, many of whom were born in the caliphate. Concomitantly, participants raised the prospects of having to deal with women who have played a key role in supporting and idealising the caliphate.

The participants also emphasised that states and the international community will need to address the issue of international crimes. Before the establishment of the caliphate and especially during its heyday, members of ISIL and their supporters committed an array of international crimes. There are therefore questions where those individuals should be tried, how they should be prosecuted, who should prosecute them and so on. Those are all important questions that will need to be addressed sooner rather than later, as effective reconstruction requires an effective post-conflict justice system. Those who have suffered at the hands of ISIL will need some form of justice, whether retributive or reconciliatory.

The participants came up with a set of recommendations:

- Our correctional services need a better understanding of how radicalisation works in prisons. This is especially important if returning foreign fighters are to be prosecuted for committing various crimes.
- Even though in Australia and in Europe great advances have taken place in cooperation across government departments, there was a general agreement that more must be done to ensure that cooperation continues and grows. In the context of Australia, great emphasis was placed on the value of having CT coordinators who can work across government.
- Much more needs to be done in addressing violent extremism online.

# THE JIHADISM-MOTIVATED TERRORIST THREAT IN GERMANY

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## The jihadism-motivated terrorist threat in Germany

Although security agencies have to acknowledge that jihadism-motivated terrorism is only one of several ideology-driven violent threats in Germany—other angles including right-wing extremism, left-wing extremism, ‘foreign’ terrorism (individuals or organisations supporting diverse terrorist activities abroad), and the potential for militant eco-activists—it still has to be assessed as the most dangerous threat at present. German law enforcement agencies, together with our colleagues in the intelligence community and international partner agencies, have successfully thwarted a number of terrorist plots over the past two years, including one attempt to use weaponised biological agents.

### Threat vectors

However, just as there is no reliable sociodemographic profile of jihadist terrorists, the threat picture is a diverse one, including:

- returning extremists who joined the Islamic State in Syria or Iraq
- ‘frustrated’ foreign terrorist fighters (people who attempted to join ISIS but were intercepted by authorities)
- ‘homegrown’ jihadists with no or only a virtual connection to IS or other international terrorist groups
- infiltrated terrorists who travelled to Germany with the intent to commit terrorist attacks.

### Returning foreign fighters

Germany is one of the countries in Europe with the highest numbers—in absolute terms—of people who travelled to Syria or Iraq out of an Islamist motivation. The potential security challenge emerging from so-called ‘returnees’ is serious. Supporters of different jihadist groups have left Germany for the Middle East in large numbers. According to findings of the German security authorities, at least 1,000 individuals have left the country to travel to Syria or Iraq out of so-called Islamist motivation, although the number could be higher. It has to be noted, though, that these numbers are not entirely comparable to other countries’ due to a different classification system. German security

agencies do not count foreign fighters, but rather register individuals regardless of nationality who left Germany for Syria or Iraq out of an Islamist motivation. There is no fixed age limit, but young children (who have been taken to the war zone in significant numbers by their parents) are not included in the overall numbers.

The military defeat of IS led to many supporters turning their backs on the organisation and returning home. German security agencies estimate that about one-third of all departees have already returned to Germany, although exact numbers are not publicly disclosed. Of those, in more than 100 cases there is enough intelligence (if not evidence) to assume they participated in armed conflict or at least received some sort of combat training. However, the working assumption is that the correct numbers are significantly higher.

It is difficult to predict how many more foreign fighters will return to Germany eventually. The exact number of jihadists still in Syria is not known, but more than 200 German residents involved with jihadist groups are believed to have been killed in Syria and Iraq.

A significant group of the returnees will be disillusioned and thus disengaged from violence-promoting ideological convictions. Others, however, will try to carry the fight to their country of origin, albeit in a more covert manner. The major challenge for the security agencies will be to identify the members of these categories.

### ‘Frustrated’ foreign fighters

German security agencies were unexpectedly effective in intercepting individuals plotting to travel to Syria or Iraq to join Islamist organisations, sometimes as late as just before they boarded planes, but more often than not much earlier in the planning stage. Criminal investigations were augmented with administrative measures such as the forfeiture of passports, enjoinder of travel abroad, orders to regularly report at the local police station, and overt electronic monitoring, resulting in these extremists being prevented from leaving Germany. The number of such cases has not been publicly released, but it is a fair assumption that it is ranging in a three-digit zone.

Though such overt measures concurrently served as an open warning that authorities were aware of the violence-promoting ideology of these individuals, it must be taken into account that a significant percentage still adheres to that ideology.

### ‘Homegrown’ extremists

With much of the international attention focused on the so-called caliphate—the *de facto* governance of large parts of Syria and Iraq by IS—the ‘homegrown’ extremists (jihadists radicalised in their own countries of origin) slowly faded out of public awareness. They nevertheless present a threat of their own, as terrorist attacks obviously do not need international communications. Homegrown extremists may be individuals with no external contacts (thus truly ‘lone actors’, although evidence suggests that only in very few cases the suspect really had no exchange with other extremists) or members of a group or even a larger domestic organisation.

### Infiltrated jihadists

In addition to the extremists who already resided in Germany before their radicalisation, IS used the flow of migrants to Europe (especially, during the major migration wave in late 2015 and early 2016) to infiltrate designated attackers into Western European countries. Though not constituting a large-scale phenomenon, these cases do pose a serious threat—both because of their direct potential to harm the victims of an assault and because of the potential (and cynically intended) secondary damage to the relationship between the original population and the migrant community.

### Countermeasures

To counter this threat, all Western societies have acknowledged that countering terrorism (or violence-promoting extremism, to use a more general term) must encompass more than just law enforcement activities.

## Intelligence

Obviously, the intelligence community plays a major role in identifying early warning signs of radicalisation of individuals and especially of groups and organisations. Through the international exchange of information between allied nations, developments and transnational links of terrorist organisations can be identified, monitored and analysed to guide both law enforcement operations and ‘civilian’ countermeasures.

## Prosecution

Involvement in terrorist activities, even when not directly related to acts of violence, has long been a criminal offence in Germany. The new phenomenon of large numbers of extremists from Western Europe, however, has highlighted certain loopholes in this legislation. Therefore, following UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014), Germany adopted key changes in its criminal code, including for planning and preparatory stages in terrorist crimes. This new legislation enables law enforcement agencies at both the state and federal levels to launch criminal investigations into individuals or groups perceived to have links to terrorist organisations or to be plotting an individual terrorist attack.

An interesting detail—not in the code, but in the ‘law in action’—is that until recently gender-based differences occurred. While male returnees from Syria or Iraq were almost always subject to criminal investigations into their possible links to IS or other terrorist organisations, many prosecutors tended to search for additional evidence (in addition to their travel) before opening a criminal investigation against women. However, in December 2017 the federal prosecutor general announced that henceforth no differences between men and women will be applied, thus accepting that the services provided by female members of IS, even when not combat-related, played a significant role in upholding the terrorist organisation’s inner system.

### Battlefield evidence

The proto-state character of IS highlighted a specific problem: in most Western countries, the actors responsible for ‘external’ security (primarily the military and the foreign intelligence services) and those with jurisdiction for homeland security (law enforcement and domestic intelligence services) operate in mostly unconnected and uncoordinated domains (the US is the most notable exception, as law enforcement agencies are routinely integrated in joint and combined efforts).

The single most obvious point here is the use of evidence collected in-theatre (that is, abroad) during military counterterrorism or counterinsurgency operations for criminal investigations against specific individuals, which is fittingly termed ‘battlefield evidence’. However, despite more than six years of fighting against IS (and important steps such as a target-oriented modification of NATO’s biometric data policy or the embedding of Interpol in the military intelligence operation Gallant Phoenix), the Western allies did not manage to establish a reliable process for the collection, aggregation, analysis and dissemination of battlefield evidence.

This is an area in which interdisciplinary international cooperation has yet to overcome traditional boundaries.

## Prevention

The entire concept of preventing violent extremism (PVE)—as different as the specific strategies are in different countries—is to prevent individuals from being exposed to violence-promoting extremist views without the parallel possibility of accessing other points of view as well, and to prevent people from adopting violence-promoting extremist views themselves (often shortened to the term ‘radicalisation’). This area is obviously not the prime responsibility of security agencies, and the tools available to security agencies are often not suited for such measures.



It is more than a cliché that ‘social policy is security policy’; that is, social circumstances and the individual’s social situation directly influence their vulnerability to deviant behaviour.

The relevant actors cover a broad range. They comprise—depending on the very different administrative systems in the European Union member states—various governmental bodies, including:

- *youth services*, as teenagers and adolescents are among the most susceptible to extremist ideologies and often have to cope with real or perceived problems that lay the groundwork for a subsequent adoption of an extremist worldview
- *social services*, as personal and economic difficulties play an important role in reducing a person’s resilience against extremist ideas
- *the educational system*—from childcare through school to university—in a dual role: first with its task of conveying societal values and a common understanding of human rights and the rule of law, and providing information on extremism; and second in being observant about children’s and adolescents’ development and possible indications of radicalisation, thus being able to refer the individual to counselling by actors in or outside the educational system
- *labour services*, which are strongly linked to the explanation above about the economic status of an individual as one factor in his or her vulnerability to extremist ideology
- *regulatory and other administrative authorities* (especially migration agencies), as their decisions may influence an individual’s behaviour in one way or another.

## Disengagement and deradicalisation

The German states (*Länder*) developed different disengagement and deradicalisation programs. Given the short timespan for which these various systems have been in place, it is too early to draw conclusions from actual or perceived results in this context.

Although Germany has vast experience with well-established disengagement programs for right-wing extremists, most experts agree that those experiences—although providing certain value in addressing the jihadist threat—cannot be duplicated without restrictions.

Given the size of the threat, this area will be of enormous importance for years, if not decades, to come.

## Child welfare

An area of increasing relevance is the development of educational (and possibly deradicalising) programs designed to address the children of Islamist extremists, including children growing up in extremist families in Germany and—even more importantly—to address children of foreign terrorist fighters. A large number of very young children have been taken by their parents to the co-called caliphate and have experienced the inhumane ideology of IS—which probably included witnessing atrocities against victims of the terrorist organisation. Security agencies know of various cases in which children were coerced into participation in murders. Once these children return to their countries of origin, it will be a serious challenge to secure their stable psychological development and to reintegrate them into our societies.

## The way ahead

Over the past decade, German authorities drastically improved their competence in PVE and CVE, strengthened the capabilities of both security and service agencies, and established a diverse and innovative non-governmental counselling and intervention landscape. However, with regard to the persisting threat posed by jihadism-motivated terrorism, the activities of the actors of Germany’s security architecture (including 20 different police forces and no less than 18 domestic intelligence services on the federal and state levels, respectively) and of the federal, the 16 states’ and myriad municipal administrations, the state actors at the local, the regional/state, and the national

levels, as well as non-governmental stakeholders, should channel their efforts in a joint holistic strategy tailored to the challenges of the threat picture. In this, the governmental part of this proposed national holistic PVE/CVE strategy should be viewed as a multiagency approach not directed by one branch of the government, but effectively tying in all activities of agencies at the local, regional and national levels, each within their respective areas of responsibility.

The international exchange of experiences—both good and best practices and not-so-successful endeavours, covering the range from the intelligence and law enforcement community over welfare services and NGOs to academic researchers—will play an important role in this context. As transnational terrorism acts globally, so will democratic societies.

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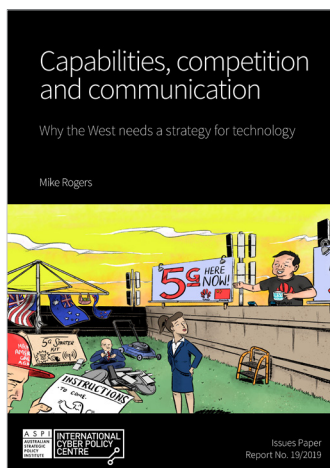
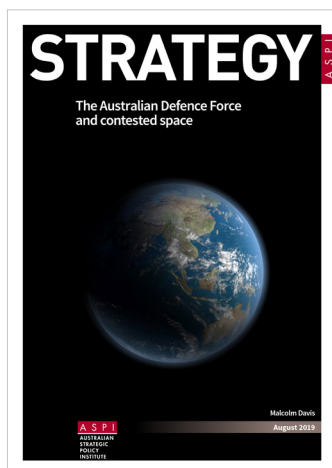
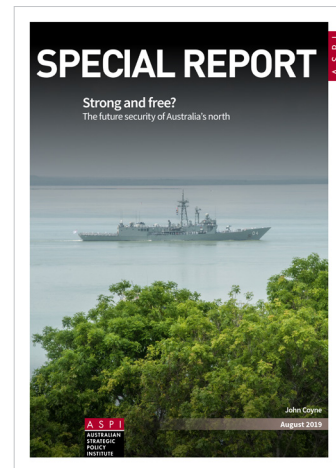
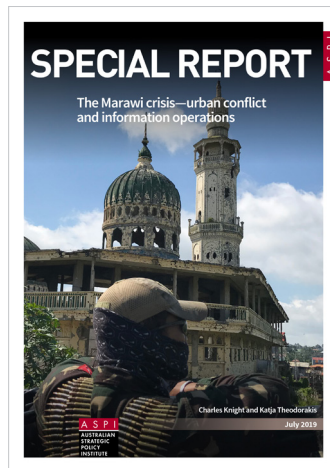
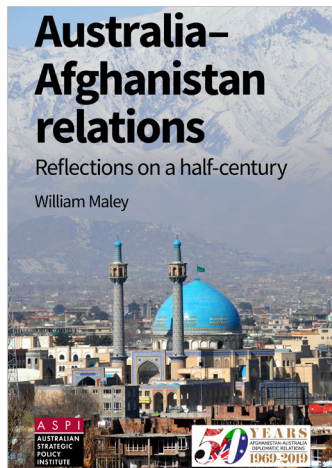
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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Australian Defence Force
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
ASPI	Australian Strategic Policy Institute
CT	counterterrorism
CVE	countering violent extremism
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
KAS	Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-government organisation
PVE	preventing violent extremism
SPU	specialised prison unit
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

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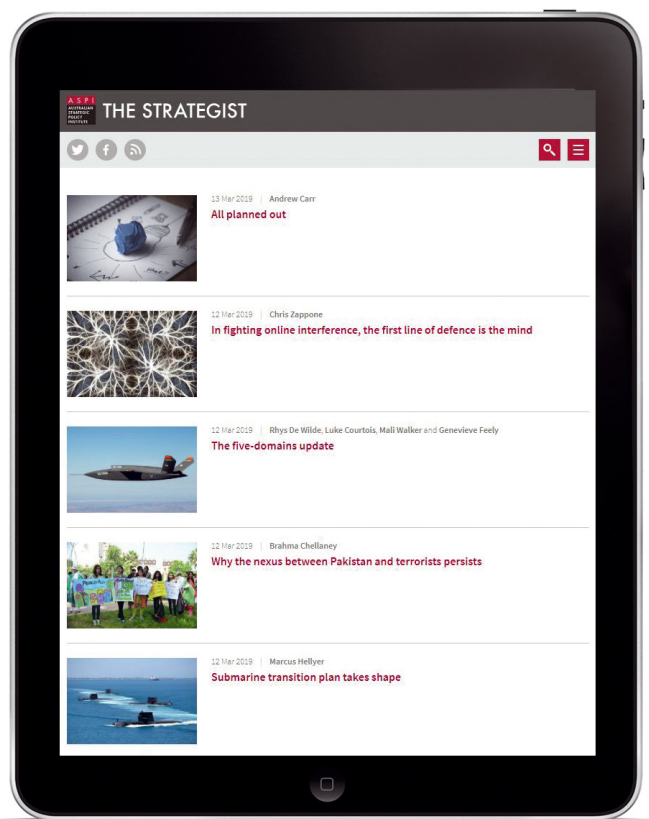


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